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ABSTRACT

This UNESCO monograph reports a study of the history and current state of parent schools in China, focusing on successes and problems with the parent school system. Section 1 describes China's response to the World Summit for Children, and details the study's aims, which are: (1) to understand family life and its roles; (2) understand the role and position of women in the family; (3) to ascertain the level of family education; (4) to find the best means for combining family, school, and social education; and (5) to promote the development of China's parent schools. Sources of data included government documents, monographs, and investigative studies dealing with family education in China; discussions and interviews with experts in the field; and on-site investigations at a family education school in China. Section 2 describes the social background of family education in China, including China's long tradition of valuing family education. Section 3 details the policy base for the birth of China's parent schools. Section 4 gives major characteristics of parent schools in China, including: (1) purpose; (2) organization and operation; (3) scope and funding; (4) content and courses; and (5) links between parent schools and compulsory education, social groups, and women's education. Section 5 analyzes the level of effectiveness of China's parent schools. Section 6 discusses current problems in China's parent school system, giving suggestions for improvement. Section 7 concludes the study, crediting China's parent school system with significant achievements over the past 10 years while still asserting that existing problems should not be ignored. Contains 26 references. (BC)

Action Research in Family and Early Childhood

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An Evaluation Study of Parent Schools in China

Ma Baolan & Guo Xiaoping

China National Institute of Educational Research

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U N E S C O

Action Research in Family and Early Childhood

April 1995

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Foreword

UNESCO and Early Child Development

Early childhood care and education is now viewed by scientific and educational research as the first and essential stage of the basic education process. Recent world conferences testify to a growing appreciation of the crucial importance of the child's earliest years, and of the need to support families and communities in their role as the child's most influential educator.

Improving children's health and nutrition is necessary, but increasingly, in a situation where fourteen out of fifteen of the world's children survive until the age of one, governments and civil society are turning their attention to the psycho-social and cognitive development of children. There is ample evidence[1] to show that healthy children who have experienced good early learning programmes are much more likely than other children to remain in primary school and achieve good results. In addition, countries that succeed in mobilizing local government, municipalities, communities and voluntary organizations in the care and education of very young children have been able to decentralise and innovate in their educational systems and, at the same time, make an important contribution toward population information and the education of women.

UNESCO's early childhood programme seeks to assist governments:

- to prepare children for schools and schools for children by encouraging and promoting respect for the young child's natural, learning process;
- to forge links at national level between the primary education system and early child development programming;
- to undertake sub-sectoral studies of the situation of young children and families, and to formulate national or regional programmes in early childhood care and education;
- to identify and support first-class universities and institutes which will research national child and family needs and train high-level personnel to plan and animate national or regional policies;
- to support pilot early childhood and family development projects that stress the education of women;
- to promote legislation on behalf of children and families, and in particular, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In addition, UNESCO in keeping with its educational, scientific and cultural mandate:

- encourages research leading to practical action and policy making in favour of young children and families;
- acts as a networking and clearing centre for information and briefings on early childhood;
- collaborates in artistic, intellectual and cultural events promoting reflection on childhood and family issues.

We are particularly pleased to be able to publish Monographs 2 and 3 of our research series, which concentrate on major programmes in China and India: *An Evaluation Study of Parent Schools in China* and *World Food Programme Assistance for Early Childhood Education in India's Integrated Child Development Services*.

While it is difficult in such vast populations to guarentee programme quality across the country, there is little doubt that these programmes are of capital importance - not only because of their scale but also because of the common-sense assumptions and mechanisms which underly their success.

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1. Myers R. *The Twelve Who Survive* London, Routledge/UNESCO 1992

A rapid analysis of the two monographs reveals:

- that children are considered to be the future of these nations and are still central in their planning;
- that good early child-rearing is vitaly important for ensuring child quality and the learning achievement of children in schools;
- that disadvantaged social groups need and deserve reinforced services which ideally should be integrated and can be seen by the poor to benefit both the children and the communities;
- that given the higher costs of public services, and the comparative advantages of the family environment in so many respects, parents are the indispensable allies of the States in ensuring the proper care and education of children;
- that the great majority of parents can be motivated and trained to educate their children well through the single expedient of linking State service provision with educational opportunity or obligation for parents. Thus the ICDS programme links free child-feeding with the opportunity for young mothers to learn more about the relevant health, nutritional and educational needs of their children. Likewise in China, the provision of free education to children is accompanied by training offered to parents showing them how to supplement the child's education at home.

Obviously, as living standards rise and group interests develop, these assumptions will be weakened. Yet they can never be entirely ignored as the social breakdown and random violence of many Western cities illustrate.

For more information, please contact:

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An Evaluation Study

of Parent Schools in China

I. Introduction

China's response to the World Summit for Children

At the 1990 World Summit for Children, governments made a joint commitment that every child shall have a better future. The children of today should carry forward their parents' work and forge ahead into the future to open up even more promising vistas. On them would fall the heavy task of creating a splendid world for mankind. In view of this the Summit adopted the *World Declaration on Children's Survival, Protection and Development*, and solemnly proclaimed:

> The family, as the basic unit of society, especially as the natural environment of children's growth and well-being, has the most important duty to foster and protect children during the process of development from babyhood to adolescence. All sectors of society should respect and support parents and other guardians in their efforts to nurture and care for children in the home environment. Children are the future of the world, the hope of mankind. The countries of the world are duty-bound to do their utmost to protect and promote children's survival and development.

On March 18, 1991, Premier Li Peng, on behalf of the People's Republic of China, signed the Declaration and the Action Plan for its implementation. In accordance with the spirit of the Declaration, the Chinese Government officially promulgated the Outline Programme for the Development of Chinese Children in 1990s. The Outline Programme points out clearly:

> The children of today are the masters of the 21st century. The survival, protection and development of children are the foundation for the improvement of the quality of the population and a prerequisite for the future development of mankind. Hence, we advocate that society should establish civic awareness and start with children in the task of improving the quality of the population. A mechanism for the integration of family education, school education and social education should be established so as to provide a harmonious environment for the healthy development of children in the home, the school and the community.

The Outline Programme stresses the key role of parents and the family in children's development and well-being. The family is the very first environment that the children grow up in, and the parents are the very first teachers in the children's progress into life. The difficulties and hardships they meet in bringing up the next generation, their problems and needs, must be accorded by society as a whole real concern, understanding and a willingness to help. The Outline Programme suggests that parents of children of different age-groups be provided with more or less comprehensive knowledge and methods of family education. Various measures and different channels should be adopted to speed up the process. In this way, the level of family education can be raised and in turn the home environment in which children grow up be changed for the better, creating favourable conditions for the development of children in the early years. One of the major measures which has enjoyed active advocacy is the setting up and running of parent schools of various types.

Family education in China

China's parent schools began in fact in the early 1980s, and have had a history of over ten years. There has always existed in China a fine tradition of giving emphasis to the education of children by the family. This national practice has been maintained for several thousand years without declining with the times. Generations of fine sons and daughters of the nation have been bred and nurtured in this manner. Since the beginning of the eighties, with the continuous development of the restructuring and opening-up process, Chinese society has undergone great changes, and education has been accorded unprecedented importance. Schools and educational institutions at all levels have been invested with the task of turning out large numbers of competent and talented people suited to the demands of the modernization process. With such a heavy load on their shoulders, the schools are in urgent need of help from all circles of society. To strengthen family education and through it to enlarge the base of school-educated talented people, has therefore become the over-riding wish of educators. At the same time it serves as the first choice of schools as a means to lessen the pressure exerted on them. With this background, parent schools first emerged without fanfare within the educational system itself.

There is, of course, another major aspect to the question that should not be neglected. Starting with the year 1979, the policy of family planning in China took on a new significance and was implemented over ever wider sections of the populace. As a result, changes began to appear in family size, family structure, the idea of the family, the way education is carried out in the family, and the parents' expectations for their children. In all these aspects, problems co-exist with successes just as new ideas co-exist with old. The negative aspects have proved harmful to the family, the society, and most of all to the up-bringing of useful people of talent. It is therefore dictated by history that family education should be developed into a science. Parent schools, being the best way to promote the scientific development of family education, have taken upon themselves this noble task.

Aims of the present study

Parent schools in China have been troubled by many problems that accompany any process of development, problems stemming from both their own innate imperfections and the obstacles put in their way by other social factors. The present study shall focus on the evaluation and study of the successful experiences of China's parent schools, while also putting forward some suggestions as to how the existing problems might best be solved. We hope that our work will be helpful to the further development of China's parent schools. In today's world many important factors call on mankind to give greater concern to the family and family education. In this context, the objective evaluation and study of China's parent schools may be seen:

- To help understand family life and imbue its roles, functions and obligations with greater social and modern characteristics. As the purposes and targets of the International Year of the Family have found general support among nations, it is clear that to promote the building of the family by way of the parent schools will help it play a fuller role in human and social development;
- To help understand the role and position of women, that is, of mothers, in the family, so as to provide a forceful base for women's equal participation in society and equal enjoyment of the rights to education and training;
- To help ascertain the general level of family education in China and to join forces with the international effort in favor of children's development;
- To help the search for the best means of combining family education, school education and social education and to provide models for new ways to bring up talented persons in the most effective way;
- To help the development of China's parent schools and their playing a more active role in the scientific development of China's family education;

Major contents of the study

- A study of the social background and policy basis for the birth of China's parent schools;
- An analysis of the basic characteristics and contents of parent schools in China;
- An evaluation of the successful experiences of China's parent schools;
- An analysis of the existing problems and some suggestions as to how China's parent schools can best be improved.

Major methods employed in the study

- *Documentary study*: The documents studied include policies, decrees, laws and regulations published by the government; monographs and treatises on family education and teaching materials for parent schools; investigative and analytical studies on the present state of family education and parent schools; report on successful cases of family education and parent schools; various theses.
- *Discussions and interviews*: Interviews with Mr. Zhao Zhongxin, expert in the study of family education of the Research Institute of Educational Science, Beijing Normal University, and Ms. Ma Ruifen, head of the Family Education Section of the Education Department of Beijing Municipal Government. Discussion with the Department of Family Education of All-China Women's Federation.
- *On-site investigation*: Family Education Central School, Chaoyan District, Beijing Municipality.*

II. The social background

China's long tradition of valuing family education

The ancient civilization of China, in its thousands of years of historical development, has consistently adhered to the fine traditions of giving emphasis to family education. In the writings of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.) and the Warring States (475-221 B.C.) the idea was recorded: "when the family is in order, the state is well governed." This maxim joins the family to the state and takes the regulation of the family as the basis of the governing of the state.

The value of proper family education

A famous story concerning the boyhood of the sage Mencius (372-289 B.C.) gives a good example of how the ancients valued proper family education. As the neighbourhood they lived in was not favourable to fostering the right qualities in the child Mencius, his mother went to great pains and moved house three times, until finally finding a satisfactory place in the neighbourhood of a school, she settled down in contentment.

* The principal investigators should like to acknowledge their gratitude to all those mentioned below for providing first-hand information and insightful thoughts on related aspects of this study: Liu Ming, Gao Baozhen, Lei Zhangyun, Ma Ruifen, Zhao zhongxin, Wang Baixiang, etc.

It is necessary to mention here that writings have existed since ancient times giving a systematic discussion of family education, one of the best-known of which is "The Family Teachings of the Clan of Yan". Written by the famous scholar Yan Zhitui (A.D. 531-590) in his late years, it is a summary of his life's experiences in perfecting himself and conducting himself correctly in society and in regulating the family and pursuing his scholarly studies, with which he wished to instruct his posterity as a set of golden rules, a code of family law. The book consists of twenty chapters, touching on many topics, with especially valuable views on the early education of the child within the family, the influence of the environment on the child and the exemplary role of the parents' behaviour on the child, many of which hold a practical significance even today.

With the continued development of Chinese society, ideas on family education made constant progress. In particular, the New Culture Movement in the early years of the present century (1919) pushed China's family education into a new historical stage. If we say that the family education of the ancient times laid a great store in teaching children to obey the wishes of the parents, family education in the new era began with a wish to understand the child.

***Family Education* (1925)**

The child educationist Chen Heqin (1892-1982) conducted a valuable investigation. Beginning in December, 1920, he carried out a detailed observation and research on his own child which lasted all of 3 years (0-3 years of age). On the basis of this study, he wrote and published his "Family Education" (1925), in which he gave primary importance to education in the home. He proposed a series of principles and methods for family education to follow. Some of these are "active encouragement", "patient guidance", and "example-setting by parents".

The book "Family Education" holds a special place as it forms a connecting link between the ancient tradition and the new thought in the history of education development in China. It inherited many of the active elements of the family education practice in the olden days, such as the emphasis on early education, on the behaviour models and oral teachings of the parents, while at the same time it breached a new front in emphasizing the importance of adapting to children's psychological traits in family education. We can say that the book laid the foundations for the scientific development of family education in China in later years.

Trends in family education since the institution of the reforms

Traditional family education in China attaches importance to early education of the child. Parents took pains to gradually imbue the child with moral precepts, combining this with teaching reading skills and imparting rudimentary knowledge in different subjects. The functions of the parents in the education of the child were well defined and their duties and responsibilities clearly delineated. These traditions are not only compatible with the general principles of present-day psychology and pedagogy, they also play an objective role in holding society together in cohesion. However, a great gap yawns between the requirements of modern family education and the content and form of traditional Chinese family education practice.

Socialization of children

From the most ancient times up to a relatively short time ago, the socialization process of Chinese children was carried out almost entirely within the family. The family became the basic environment in which children formed their personalities. Education and socialization processes within the confines of the family placed greater emphasis on attachment and emotion than on reason and the intellect. They relied more on precepts than on enlightening through elicitation. Parents valued ethical correctitude rather than practical ability and skills. As they did not find it easy to extend their thought, a negative impact was produced inevitably on the quality and character of the children and on the persons they eventually become. The narrow social experience of the family circle tended to produce habits of indecision and procrastination, obedience and concession, feelings of "face" and vanity, conservativeness and resistance to change, lack of the spirit of cooperation, etc.

In the China of today, reform and opening to the outside world have become the two major forces propelling society onward. The realization of the four modernizations and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation have become a gigantic, creative task confronting the people and filling them with a sense of great urgency. In our view, the modernization of minds is the key to the success of the project. Raising the quality of the people as a whole plays a decisive part in attaining the ultimate goal of their socialization. Raising quality, it is true, depends on school education and social education, but education in the home has an even more direct bearing in the process. The need to nurture a generation of people of a new type places family education in a position more prominent than ever before. Under such circumstances, a social trend has appeared of attaching importance to family education and replacing outdated ideas on the subject with new ones. This trend has found reflection in the following changes:

- In the very conception of family education, "one-sided education" is changing into "comprehensive education" . In the past, parents tended to give attention only to raising the intellectual powers of the children while neglecting education in non-intellectual factors. In order to bring up children into adults with an all-round development, we must give them an all-inclusive education, combining moral, intellectual, physical, artistic and comprehensive technical education, so as to help them to mature in all the aspects and develop into labourers with socialist consciousness, with a knowledge of science and culture, and with a healthy body.

- With regard to the objectives of family education, the traditional mentality of expecting the offspring to become a person in possession of great power, prestige and wealth is gradually shifting to a new wish to shape him into a modern man or woman. The long history of small-scale farming by individual owners and the mode of production this entailed, prompted parents to think of children as their "private property", with the result that family education was aimed at turning the son into a mandarin by virtue of his excelling in the study of the Confucian classics. He was expected to be filled with filial piety and carry out his duties as a son, manage the family fortunes with frugality, become the support and comfort of the parents in their old age, produce male offspring to continue the family line, who would in turn become mandarins in a high position, so that eternal honour would be brought to the clan and the ancestors. This sort of education tended to produce people who were limited in knowledge, short-sighted, and lacking in ability. The present state of the nation demands that "labourers be educated in the hundreds of millions, to become able and hard-working to serve in industry, agriculture, commerce and many other professions. These people should be talented, with high ideals and morals, well-educated and disciplined, filled with love for the socialist motherland, and determined to work hard all

their lives to make the country strong and the people rich. They should pursue new knowledge indefatigably and be imbued with the scientific spirit of seeking truth from facts, thinking independently and daring to innovate". It is self-evident that this is not only the goal of school education and social education, but also the goal of family education.

- Changes are also taking place as regards the content of family education. The "closed" mode of family education is in a process of transition, changing into the "open" mode. The former is based on feudal standards of conduct and stresses the three cardinal guides (guidance by the ruler of the subject, by the father of the son and by the husband of the wife) and the five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity), the three obediences of a woman (to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage and to her son after the death of her husband) and her four virtues (morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work), a blind belief in books and one's superiors, and dogmatism. All this formed the basic content of family education in the old days.

The six "liberations"

Today new thinking has followed the initiation of the process of reform, swamping the closed gates of family education and infinitely enriching and multiplying the content of home education. It is recognised that children must be set free in six respects. Their minds should be liberated, so that they think in a lively way and engage in innovative and creative thinking. Their eyes should be taught to read and observe, in order to widen their perspective. They should remove the plugs from their ears and listen to the songs of insects and birds in their natural surroundings, to fine music, and to moving tales. Their mouths should come unmuffled, and they should be given more opportunity to express themselves through reciting, story-telling, participating in intellectual games, competitions and public speaking. Their hands should be unbound to enable them to do physical work and acquire skills in preparation for the future. Last but not least, their legs should be unshackled, to allow them to go into nature and society, to interact with people and make acquaintances. It is through these six "liberations" that they will acquire courage to engage in all sorts of social practice and build up their abilities.

The "open" mode of family education aims at nurturing the kind of characteristics and abilities that help children to adapt themselves to ever-changing environments, activate their thinking process, deepen and widen their basic knowledge, expand their vision, and learn how to learn. As a result, they will acquire the habit and methods to continue the learning process all their lives.

- In the learning pattern, family education is shifting from a one-way process to a "give-and-take cycle" -- a process based on interaction. Education in the home used to be carried out with the parents teaching and the children passively learning, building up the absolute authority of parents in educating the children and the absolute obedience of the children in accepting the education from their parents. This is a relationship of inequality. Inevitably, this domineering and imperious mode of one-way inculcation has now been shattered.

Vital importance of family education

Many parents have come to see the vital importance of family education and the new demands that modern society makes on children. They agree that the educators must be educated first, and are working hard to take in scientific literacy and academic knowledge, so as to be able to teach the children in a more competent way. From this understanding has evolved the "give-and-take cycle" of family education in which teaching and learning have become a two-way, interactive process in which the two generations of a family make progress simultaneously. One marked phenomenon is that in the rural areas in general, the literacy rate among parents has risen greatly, which in turn has helped to raise the enrollment rate of school-age children and diminished the drop-out rate, effectively stemming the formation of new illiterates at the source. In addition, the fact that primary education has become increasingly universal has quickly lowered the illiteracy rate of parents. It seems now possible to cut the illiteracy rate of 15-45 year-olds to below 5% by the year 2000.

It is still to early to describe in any great detail the trends in family education in China. However, there could be no doubt that family education must carry on with all the reasonable and rational factors of old traditional practice, change certain outdated ideas, and cooperate in an all-out effort with school education and community education to cultivate a generation of modern citizens. This is the direction it should undoubtedly take.

Parent schools as the best means of promoting China's family education

Family education is something that affects not only the present society, but also society in the future. It lays the foundation stone for the growth of children. In addition, it may enhance and strengthen the good effects produced by social and school education, or offset and even obstruct them. It is because of this that we say family education is not a private matter. In present circumstances, it affects both the attainment of the global target of basic education for all and the improvement of the cultural quality of the Chinese nation.

Parents as teachers

For the education of her children, China has set up more than 990,000 schools of all types and levels and trained and organized a contingent of teachers numbering about 13 million. The figures are staggering. However, we know from historical records and present reality, that there is a much larger troop of teachers than this who must not be neglected. These are the children's own parents. The family is the child's first school, and the parents its first teachers. China has three hundred million families, with six hundred million parents. This is indeed the world's largest contingent of teachers.

First educate the educators -- this shall be taken as the entry point in the attempt to improve China's family education. With China's wide expanse of territory and huge population, families in different areas with different levels of economic and cultural development have different problems. Parents hold different views on education by virtue of their differing cultural backgrounds, personalities, and personal accomplishments. Parent schools can be organized in a multitude of flexible forms, to satisfy the particular needs of parents differing widely in local, professional, and cultural background. Thus it constitutes

the best option for both raising the qualitative and educational level of the parents themselves, and for improving the present state of family education. In fact, no sooner had parent schools been launched than they won public recognition in an enthusiastic manner. Statistics show that there are now over 240,000 parent schools of all kinds across the country, giving a forceful push to family education and helping it to perform its due social functions.

A typical parent school in China: the Family Education Central School of Beijing Chaoyang District

Founded on October 10th, 1987, the Family Education Central School of Chaoyang District, Beijing, has sponsored altogether 137 training courses for parents, involving more than 130,000 persons whose children study in 192 secondary and primary schools or kindergartens of this District. So far, as many as 104,413 persons have concluded their studies. There are still twenty-two ongoing training courses with a total enrollment of 26,428 persons. This school was founded by seven retired experienced teachers under the leadership of the respectable retired District head, Mrs. Liu Ming.

Orientation, training and source of funds

- In keeping with the motto of the Beijing Social Welfare Foundation - "service to society, service to schools, service to children's parents" - the purpose of the School is to act as a complementary force in the management of schools, in improving family education, in creating an environment in which young people will grow up as competent, qualified builders of a modernized China. The curriculum of the School is based on this aim (it is evaluated later in this study).

- The length of training is one year, consisting of eight face-to-face lectures, taking the form of voluntary and concentrated consultation.

- Source of funds: apart from social donations, moderate sundry fees are collected. At its early founding stage, only RMB 3 yuan was charged from each participating parent. Now, it has risen to 10 yuan (just a little more than US$ 1 dollar).

School organization and management

- Under the leadership of the school principal, the chief administrator of the school, there is the School Commission of Administrative Affairs. The School Commission is made up of an Honourary President, representatives from the local women's federation, representatives from the Educational Bureau of the district and schools, part-time teachers, representatives from children's parents, and staff members of this very school.

- Information is given to parents before they register for the school year so that they know what they are here for, what they are going to learn and what is expected of them. Attendance is obligatory on the part of the learners. At the conclusion of the training year, each parent is expected to write a summary of his/her study and performance in the past year before certificates are conferred by way of conclusion. Those who have distinguished themselves in their studies or those whose children have made marked progress at school may be appraised as fine or excellent learners.

- Special staff members from neighboring primary and secondary schools or kindergartens are appointed to undertake the training of the children's parents. They are also in charge of the learners' discipline, recruitment of new learners, propaganda, rollcalling and keeping records of the learners' performance at school.

Effect of the training course and its impact

- Coverage of the training: Chaoyang District is at once an urban and suburban district, covering an area of 470 square kms with a population of 1,330,518, of whom 930,444 live in urban areas and 400,074 are rural population. Chaoyang District boasts 321

schools at different levels, of which 192 schools participate in the training of children's parents, accounting for 59.81% of the district's total. 170 of the 200 urban primary and middle schools are involved in this programme, making up 85% of the total while only 22 of the 121 rural primary and middle schools participate in this training course, accounting for 18.08%.

In a planned and systematic manner, the Family Education Central School gives courses on family education to children's parents by bringing learners and teachers together in the same classroom. Such form of family education has never been attempted before in Beijing and yields far better results than any other school of the same sort.

- The survey conducted in March 1994 among 3,387 families who had attended this training course in different schools and kindergartens of the district shows that most of participating parents are workers and peasants, middle-aged parents with junior or senior middle school education and an average family income of RMB 800 yuan per month. Most of the participants are mothers, accounting for more than 60%, with fathers or other guardians less than 40%. The following tables classifies participants in terms of age, educational level, family income and occupation.

Age of children's parents

	number	%
Below 30 years old	82	2.42
30-39	1490	44
40-49	1589	46.91
50-59	170	5.02
Over 60 years old	56	1.65

Educational levels of children's parents

	number	%
Primary school	181	5.34
Junior secondary school	1206	35.61
Senior secondary school	1173	34.63
College or institute	788	23.27
Postgraduate education	39	1.15

Family income per month

	number	%
Below RMB 400	305	9
RMB 401-700	1006	29.7
RMB 701-1000	1025	30.26
RMB 1001-1500	767	22.65
Over RMB 1500	284	8.39

Occupation of children's parents

	Fathers		Mothers	
	num.	%	num.	%
Workers	1177	34.75	1322	39.03
Peasants	285	8.41	455	13.43
Military men or women	41	1.21	10	0.3
Administrative officers	511	15.09	387	11.43
Teachers	107	3.16	228	6.73
Scientific & technical workers	301	8.89	225	6.64
Artists or entertainers	12	0.35	9	0.27
Doctors or nurses	43	1.27	149	4.4
Sportsmen or sportswomen	4	0.12	1	0.03
Entrepreneurs	60	1.77	16	0.47
Self-employed businessmen	49	1.45	30	0.89
Joint state-private enterprisers	78	2.3	66	1.95
Salesmen or Saleswomen	145	4.28	309	9.12
Individual Labourers	90	2.66	63	1.86
Bus & Taxi drivers	386	11.4	37	1.09
Newspaper men or women	23	0.68	13	0.38
Others	75	2.21	67	1.98

- Effects of the training programme: Seen as a whole, the training programme has brought about awareness among the participants, improved methods in the way they deal with their children, progress in their children's scores and harmony in family. The survey conducted among 5842 participants in 45 schools between 1992-94 showed that as many as over 90% of the participants had undergone changes in their outlook about children's education and that over 92% of the participants had improved themselves in the way they treat their children. In addition, over 91% of their children have made progress in one way or another.

  For seven consecutive years, on account of high quality teaching and remarkable results, this school has been highly praised by children's parents, teachers and the community as a whole. In 1992, the school won the award from the China Commission of Education and the All-China Women's Federation as a distinguished parent school. More than that, it has hosted visitors from different parts of China and visitors from abroad.

Key to the success of this school:

- The guarantee of a contingent of qualified teachers: leading experts, scholars, professors with long teaching experience as well as excellent class advisors from Beijing and other parts of the country are appointed as part-time teachers at this school. In the past seven years, as many as sixty-three teachers of this kind have been invited to teach at this school. In the past two years, some of the fine ex-learners of the school have been invited to give lessons here.

- Publication of professional books on family education. In light of Beijing Family Education Programme, they have formulated the *Teaching Plan for the Training of Parents Who Have Children at Primary or Secondary Schools*. In order to further the promotion of family education, in 1989, the School compiled six pamphlets, laying emphasis on content. In 1992 they published a book entitled *Specific Examples of Family Education* to promote

the exchange of experiences in the teaching of offspring. Again in 1993, they published *Forum on Family Education*, which serves as a guide to teaching and to improving teaching quality.

- Promotion of scientific research on family education: Based on popularizing the ABCs of family education, new efforts were made by the School to study the laws of education. In 1989, a scientific study group of family education was set up in the Central School, which was followed by groups of this kind in other schools. Some of these groups admitted children's parents into them. Two symposiums on family education have been held since 1992, at which 120 essays were read and discussed. These essays cover a wide range of subjects, closely geared to real life and existing problems such as education of the young in single parent families, psychological hygiene, etc. Quite a few of the essays written by the science study group have won prizes at both district and municipal levels. The survey entitled *Family Education of Junior-Middle School Students - Problems and Resolutions* was highly appraised as an excellent report by the Beijing Education Society in May 1991. Another essay entitled *Survey and Study of What Parents Expect of Their Children* based on questionnaires sent to 3387 families, was awarded the first-class prize by the Beijing Family Education Research Society in May 1994.

The policy base for the birth of China's parent schools

General policies

Since the early 1980s, the Chinese government has formulated and proclaimed a series of policies aimed at protecting children and promoting their education and development. These policies invariably embody corresponding requirements from parents and families could work actively for the promotion of parent schools.

- The Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China: This was the first law on compulsory education formulated and proclaimed since the founding of the People's Republic. Made public in April 1986, the law makes distinct legal stipulations for the school education of 6-14 year-olds. Provision 4 stipulates that the state, society, schools and families are empowered to protect the right of school-age children and juveniles of receiving compulsory education. Provision 11 stipulates that parents or other guardians shall have to send their school-age children or wards to school, so that they may receive the designated number of years of compulsory education.

- Notice on the Reform and Strengthening of Moral Education in Secondary and Primary Schools: This Notice issued in December 1988, was a call made by the Chinese government to the whole of society to show concern for and give protection to the healthy growth of primary and secondary school children. The Notice pointed out in no uncertain terms that parents are the first teachers of children, and that all parents must show responsibility to society and posterity and give a good education to their children by earnestly practising what is demanded of them. It called on parents to change out-dated and backward views and methods of family education. It instructed educational departments of government and schools to give active guidance to family education. Primary and secondary schools were told to enlist parents who educate their children well to participate in school education. Radio and TV networks, newspapers, periodicals and other news media were to carry features on family education and to propagate knowledge of family education.

- The Protection of Minors Law of the People's Republic of China: This Law, proclaimed by the Chinese Government in September 1991, was the first comprehensive legal document since the founding of the People's Republic of China designed for the protection of the physical and mental health of minors and their legal rights. "Family Protection" forms an important chapter in this legal code, and it stipulates that parents and guardians

should respect the right to education of minors under their care. They should educate them with healthy ideas and morals in appropriate ways so as to lead them onto the path of sound development and growth.

Outline Programme for the Development of Chinese Children in the 1990s

In order to respond to the call of the World Summit for Children, the Chinese Government promulgated in March 1992 the Outline Programme for the Development of Chinese Children in 1990s, affirming the major targets of the decade for survival, protection and development. One of the most important measures to ensure the achieving of these targets is "Implementation of Protection" which provides for the wide propagation of knowledge about healthy birth, nurturing and education of children. In urban areas, the provision to parents of children of various age-groups thus includes comprehensive family education programmes. In rural areas, correct methods of child-care and education are propagated through radio parent schools, parent schools at the county, township and village levels, and family education counselling stations.

Concrete policies

With the continued extension of family education, governments at the provincial and municipal levels have formulated and promulgated their own programmes for family education. The average programme of this kind is drawn up jointly by the education administration departments, departments working in the field of women and children (such as the Women's Federations), and institutions working on family education research. They are carried out under the supervision of the education administration. The programmes act both as an outline of conduct that parents follow in the education of children, and as an outline of action that other relevant departments and institutions follow in their direction of family education. The programmes generally make clear and definite interpretation of the significance, tasks and guiding principles of family education, while at the same time putting forward definite requirements of parents, schools and society regarding the fundamental contents of family education. Thus the programmes have proved to be of practical instructive value to the birth and proliferation of parent schools across the country.

Programme for Family Education of Primary School Children of Beijing

In Beijing, the Education Department under the Beijing Municipal Government, the Beijing Women's Federation and the Beijing Family Education Research Society jointly proclaimed in 1987 the Programme for Family Education of Primary School Children of Beijing. It proposes the following requirements: "Parents must study psychology, pedagogy and other theories related to family education, have an understanding of the laws governing the mental and physical development of children, learn from the experiences gained in family education, so as to raise the level of family education all round "; "Schools must include family education as an important integral part of the educational work of the school, set up parent schools, hold lectures on family education, and strengthen exchange of information so that the school and the parents can work in close combination and form a joint force in education." The great majority of the parent schools in Beijing have acted on these requirements and evolved their work around the following themes: propagating a recognition of the importance of family education, disseminating the scientific bases of family education, uplifting the innate quality of the parents themselves, and forging stronger links between school and parents.

Major characteristics of China's parent schools

Purpose of parent schools

Parent schools link school, family and community. Their fundamental task is to improve the educational level and qualifications of parents, and through parents, to promote literacy and the education of children. The concrete aims of the parent schools are:

- To help parents see the importance of family education: Home education is especially important in the development of the child's intellect and in the formation of good behaviour and habits in the early stages. Second, school education needs the support and co-ordination of education at home, as the latter is much better directed to special needs, much more timely and continuous than that given in the school, and constitutes an essential basis and supplement to school education. Third, the development of society requires that the family makes necessary progress. Education in the family, which is the fundamental unit of society, includes not only the education of the children by the parents, but also the self-education of the parents. A good family environment formed through family education will prove beneficial not only to the healthy growth of the children, but also to social well-being and stability.

- To help parents understand four special characteristics of their role in family literacy: The very first inter-personal relationship that the children experience in life is the relation with the parents at home. In the process of their contact and communication with the parents they become progressively socialized through imitating the parents' speech and behaviour. Second, the parents' education of children is aimed directly at their needs. The children open their true selves to their parents, who get to know the children through living with them daily in close contact. They therefore have a complete grasp of the children's special characteristics. Third, parental education carries a sense of authority. Their children are bonded to them by blood and family ties have a strong foundation in personal love. The trust and respect children feel for their parents make them more amenable to education by the latter. Fourth, the parents' influence is long-lasting. The bond between children and parents is a life-long one. Most of the time, the parents exert on the children an unconscious, subtle and imperceptible influence that works with great effect. Their life-styles, work ethic, their views and opinions on life and society, even their views of friends and colleagues, the attitudes they take towards each - all of these will inescapably find reflection in their offspring.

- To help parents learn scientific teaching methods: Firstly, parents will be made aware of the fact that family education is a science. Second, parents are given fundamental theoretical knowledge in pedagogy and psychology, especially the psychological and physiological characteristics of children at a particular age-group, so as better to understand and use the basic principles and methods of family education. Third, exchanges are conducted among parents in methods and experiences of education for children.

In a word, the aim of parent schools in China is to contribute to the reform of the whole school education system, through the formulating of a cooperative model unifying school, family and community education and through improving the environment of basic education.

Organization and operation of parent schools

In China today, parent schools are organized in a multitude of forms which satisfy the particular needs of families belonging to widely different social strata in different localities. Four general types are discerned:

- Parent schools run by schools or departments of education administration: These parent schools are organized with a view to closely supplementing and coordinating with school education. They are either run by a single school or by several schools acting in conjunction. Parents are divided into groups according to the classes their children study in, and are taught basic knowledge about pedagogy and psychology. Schools also give parents timely information on what their children are expected to learn and do at school, and what the schools and teachers require of them.

- Parent schools run by the community: These schools set their sights on uplifting the quality of the parents and creating a civilized home environment.

Community-run parent schools

In Guogong Township of Changping County, Beijing, for instance, the leading officials of the township government have persisted for many years in taking upon themselves the task of educating the villagers in civilized morals and behaviour, calling on parents to build a cultured ethos for the family and to set up basic rules of civilized conduct for all members of the family. One special feature in the township is the organization of spectator and participation entertainment, recreation, and sports activities with the help of the schools and other social forces through which parents and other villagers receive education in enjoyable and varied ways.

- Parent schools run by institutions for family education research: These schools are oriented toward the whole community and focus on researching questions that arise in the course of parents educating their children. Consultations are held regularly for this purpose, and family education training courses are offered to disseminate scientific education knowledge to those who need it most.

- Parent schools run by other social groups: Hospitals run pregnancy and childbirth schools for prospective parents and parenthood schools for couples with new-born babies and pre-school children. Some rehabilitation centres for disabled children run schools for the parents of special children. Even radio and TV stations feature parent programmes on their channels.

Provision of parent education

With the diversified organizational form of parent schools comes a variety of mode of practice. As parent schools must take into consideration the actual professional differences of parents from varying work posts, parent education is given in many different ways. The following are the four most commonly seen: 1) Classroom teaching, in which parents attend regular classes and lectures; 2) Expert consultation, in which experts give regular or ad hoc consultant instruction to parents in a practical manner; 3) Radio, TV and correspondence courses, in which the media are employed to reach a much wider body of parents so as to disseminate knowledge about family education; and 4) Exchange of experience, which enables parents to learn from each other's successful experience in family education and to draw confidence and inspiration from each other.

Scope and funding of parent schools

The large numbers of parent schools in China boggle the mind. A statistical count made by the All-China Women's Federation in 1993 registered over 240,000 parent schools of all types in the country: 223,137 at the county and district levels; 21,007 at the provincial, prefectural and municipal levels; and 2,053 municipal schools directly under the central authority control. In Beijing alone, a sample investigation by the Education Department of Beijing municipality registered 853 parent schools of all types in the 1, 168 primary and secondary schools sampled, amounting to 73% of the schools investigated.

Parent schools in China are widely distributed, not only in all the large and mid-sized cities and municipalities, but also spreading downward into the rural areas. Some counties, townships and villages have set up integrated networks of parent schools. For example, in the Yichun prefecture of Jiangxi province, a total of 1,500 parent schools have been set up in the ten counties and municipalities of the prefecture, encompassing all the townships and villages, with 320,000 parents imbibing, in varying degress, basic knowledge on family education.

Financially, all parent schools are non-profit institutions. For one thing, most parent schools do not boast of separate premises. The average parent school makes use of the local primary or secondary school building, and the use is invariably free of charge. While the organization work and teaching work fall mainly on the teachers of the schools or on experienced retired teachers and pedagogical experts, they mostly offer their valuable service without asking for any compensation in return. The teaching materials used in such schools are compiled and published trough funding from the government, and the cost that the parents have to bear is very low. Though a fee is paid by parents for attendance at the parent schools, it is at most nominal, and is expended mostly on providing teaching materials and the printing of certificates issued to parents who pass the grade at the end of the course.

Contents of courses at parent schools

A whole library of all kinds of books on family education has emerged since the early 1980s, at least 500 titles making the shelves of the Beijing Library. The variety matches the numbers, including systematic series of teaching materials on the theory of family education and materials for use in parent schools; question-and-answer handbooks on problems in family education; compilations of essays and articles on actual cases of family education and experiences; story books and anecdotal literature of family education concerning famous historical figures; and translations of books on family education published in foreign countries. Under the general heading of teaching materials for parent schools we find many series of well-organized "textbooks" compiled by groups in different localities, such as the *Basic Course for Parents of Primary School and Secondary School Children* published by the Nanjing Publishing House, the *Teaching Materials for Parent Schools of lst-2nd Year Primary School Children*, etc. all published in Liaoning province. Teaching materials tailored for the need of parents of particular groups of children include *the Family and the Education of the Only Child* from Shaanxi province, *Family Education for Rural Children* from Beijing, *Family Education for Single-Parent Families* from Beijing, *A Correspondence Course for Parents of Deaf Children* from Hunan province, etc. The emergence of large numbers of such titles provides parent schools with a wide choice of materials, which touch on the following focal points:

- Basic theories about family education: A science of family education; Principles of family education; Main factors affecting children's growth within families; Psychology of family education; Features of children at different ages; Legal regulations for parents' education; The moral culture of the family; Non-intellectual factors and family education; Family guidelines for children's study; Education for family hygiene; Juvenile delinquency and family education; Parent's education and cultural attainment; Links between family education, school education and community education.

- Foci of teaching curriculum:

  School for parents of kindergarten children: Nutrition; Hygiene; Psychological features of and education measures for sole children; Games for early intellectual development and proper behaviour.

  School for parents of primary pupils: Cultivate their children's adjustment abilities and to shifting their main activities from games to studies; Form regular living habits by setting up living rules. Cultivate the ability and habit of helping in house work; Cultivate the habit of obeying rules and moral conventions.

  School for parents of junior middle school students: Psychological features of junior middle students; Education for junior students; Guide for social communication; Observation of dynamic changes in juvenile behaviors; Instruction against negative influences from immoral behavior and improper media; Strengthen respect for laws and regulations; Practicing hardworking and thrift.

  School for parents of senior middle school students: Education to inculcate proper ideals and views of the world; Introduction to the affairs of state; Guidance for college entrance and choice of profession.

- A knowledge of the basic contents of school education, of what schools require of their offspring, and an acquaintance with supplementary educational means in the home. This is the concrete area that embodies the interface between family education and school education and as such has become the focus of attention of both the family and the school. It has become an essential focus for study at parent schools of all types. In teaching materials for such schools, the compilers have gone so far as to set out the basic academic contents of each course/subject, the basic requirements for the lessons, focal points the parents should coach their children in, and additional sums and exercises. For instance, *Study Requirements and Coaching Material for 1st-Year to 3rd-Year Primary School Subjects*, etc. However, most parent school teaching materials are edited in accordance with the general spirit of giving children at school a basic education in intellectual, moral, artistic and physical domains suiting their years and are aimed at helping the parents to get a good grasp of corresponding teaching tools.

Seeing that the study contents of parent schools needed further definition and standardization, the All-China Women's Federation and the National Family Education Research Society compiled in 1993 a *National Guidance Programme for the Compilation of Training Materials for Family Education*, as reference teaching material for parent schools nationwide. UNICEF commented favourably on the book and called for its use in all future family education training projects. The General Principles part of the book expounds on the definition and significance of family education and elucidates the teaching principles, the new view on family education and the good qualities parents should possess. In the part sub-titled Basic Contents and divided into 5 separate chapters, the important topics of "Marriage, Pregnancy and Good Childbirth", "Teaching and Nurturing 0-3-Year-Olds". "Teaching and Nurturing 4-6-Year-Olds", "Education of Primary Pupils", and "Education of Junior Secondary School Children" are dealt with in detail. In each chapter, separate parts and passages deal with the children's physiological and psychological characteristics and with what parents can do to improve their children's education.

Links between parent schools and compulsory school education at all levels

In China, educational policy has always taken home education as an integral part of the overall education system of the state. The emergence of parent schools is a natural result of the combination of education at home and at school, a concrete form of expression of the mature interaction between the two. At one stroke, two needs coming from the school and the family with regard to the education of children are met: the school education's need of co-ordination with the family, and the home educator's need of guidance from the school. Hence, the relationship between parent schools and schools for children of all ages is one of mutual benefit. Of course, in the last resort, parent schools exist, first of all, to supplement

and co-ordinate with compulsory school education. Hence, they have the following common characteristics:

- Parent schools are set up and run by compulsory education schools at different levels, with enthusiasm on the part of teachers and community, aimed at establishing communication, urging parents to give proper attention to the home education of the children, so as to improve the efficiency of basic education. In Beijing, the very first parent school was set up in the Shawo Primary School in Haidian District in 1980. By holding regular classes for parents, inviting parents to audit their children's classes, starting up a family education consultancy service, and calling on parents to submit suggestions and proposals for the improvement of school education, it strengthened the ties between parents and school and heightened the parents' enthusiasm for improving the work of the school. This first step was followed in the ensuing years by many schools in the Beijing municipality, so that in 1987 the municipal government took the lead in promulgating a *Teaching Programme for Family Education of Primary and Secondary School Children*, with the aim of giving guidance to more parent schools and helping their standardization.

- Parent schools take an active role in informing parents about the learning requirements of compulsory education schools at different levels. First, parents are instructed to attach great importance to the early education of children, to prepare their children for first entry into school without coming up against unnecessary hitches. Second, they instruct parents to make great efforts to supplement and co-ordinate with the education at school, so that the growing children may continue to consolidate in a good family environment the results of the education they receive at school. Third, they instruct parents to give importance to their own role as teachers at home, and explore ways to forge links between direct education at school and the indirect influence of home so that together they should promote the healthy growth of the children.

- Schools at different levels have progressively put parent schools into their overall planning, and have done their best to ensure that parent schools are under the charge of specially appointed persons, have their assigned classrooms, possess adequate teaching plans and teaching materials, and sum up and evaluate their work properly at the end of each course. All parents who attend regularly and pass the grade are issued with certificates. A concerted effort to realize all these aims is now underway, with the municipal education authorities and the public schools at all levels taking the lead.

Links between parent schools and various social groups

While they enjoy the enthusiastic support of schools, parent schools also draw general support from all circles of society:

- A large proportion of parent schools rely on the support of the community in which they operate. They are usually under the unified administration of a Family Education Leading Group organized jointly by the schools, government education departments, women's federations, residents' committees, and various enterprises and institutions of the community.

Community parent schools

In the municipality of Laohekou, Hubei Province, 69 community parent schools have been founded in the past few years and 500 lectures and lessons have been conducted for more than 6,200 parents. Under the auspices of the Family Education Research Society, they have run a total of 175 short family education courses at the municipal, county, township and village levels, training more than 7,500 parents. In addition, making full use of the facilities for scientific research of the Pedagogical Scientific Research Institute of Laohekou municipality, they made comprehensive social investigations and gained a good idea of the most urgent family education problems and difficulties. On this basis they formulated topics of great interest and started a family education radio lecture series, "A Golden key: 40 Lectures on How to Educate Your Children into Talented Persons", which drew enthusiastic response from the listeners.

- The media take part in family education and help to increase the impact of parent schools. This is a field which has yielded rich harvests up till now. Aside from TV, radio and correspondence parent school programmes, telephone parent schools have appeared and are gaining acceptance. Parent schools not only exist at and below the provincial, regional and municipal levels, but also at the national level.

Radio, TV and correspondance parent schools

In January 1994, the National Parent School was founded in the form of a family education TV series, "Family Education of China", screened by the China Education TV Network at prime time on Wednesdays and Fridays. Consisting of 100 lectures, the series was designed and the script written by the National Family Education Research Society with the help of many experts, scholars and experienced workers in the field of family education, who were instrumental in deciding the topics and contents of the lectures. The series gives the viewer a fairly comprehensive foundation in family education. This large-scale video series is also intended as a contribution from China to the International Year of the Family. It is expected that the screening of the series will achieve a substantial change in family literacy and general quality of family relations in the country as a whole. The extension of TV parent schools was greatly promoted by the start up in 1993 of the series "Lectures on Modern Family Education" broadcasted by the Central Radio and TV University, and screened as one of the regular courses at scheduled times nationwide. Apart from this, the provincial and municipal TV stations have their own TV parent schools with varied curricula. As early as in 1983, the Beijing TV Station screened the "Lectures on Family Education of Babies and Pre-School Children". Radio parent schools had been in action even earlier. In 1982 the Central People's Radio Station started the "Lectures on Family Education". The Hunan People's Radio Station started the "Family Pedagogy" series at about the same time. At present, the Beijing Family Education Consultancy Service Centre is working in co-operation with Radio Beijing to air a thrice-weekly (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) regular programme of consultancy on issues of interest. Correspondence parent schools are also diversified. In some provinces and municipalities, newspapers carry a Parents' Letterbox column answering letters from parents seeking help with difficulties encountered in the education of their children. In 1993, a special family education hotline was opened in Shanghai with the help of various social sectors. Teachers and educational experts answer phone calls from parents and give them information on home education. It is widely hoped that this will greatly promote the development of family education.

- Publishers give assistance to the cause of family education by publishing books on the subject and teaching materials for parent schools. As mentioned earlier, more than 500 titles have been put on the shelves of Beijing Library since the 1980s, dealing with the topic of family education in all its aspects. Almost all provincial and municipal publishing houses have put out books of this kind, though the numbers vary. The large collection of such books prove that the publishing departments and enterprises at all levels have been doing their best to promote the cause of family education.

Links between parent schools and women's education

"A mother well educated is equal to a family well educated, and all mothers well educated means a whole nation well educated." This is the gist of the message being propagated and promoted in China in an effort to raise the status of women. In fact, ever since 1949 Chinese women have seen their cultural and educational levels greatly raised. The Statistical Information on Chinese Women (1991) published by the All-China Women's Federation shows that of all the employed women in China, including staff and workers, 6.92% have been educated at institutes of higher learning and higher vocational institutes, 36.84% have been educated at senior secondary schools and mid-level vocational schools, and 44.5% have finished junior secondary school.

However, this development has been extremely unbalanced, and the education and cultural development of women and female children in rural China remains a serious social problem that cries out for early solution. Though in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, clear-cut stipulations safeguard the equal political, economic, cultural, educational, social and family rights of women with men, statistics of the 4th National Population Censorship conducted in 1990 showed that illiterate people made up 15.88% of China's total population, most of them being women and girls. Therefore the "Law of the People's Republic of China to Safeguard the Rights and Interests of Women", enacted in 1992, reaffirms that the state safeguards the enjoyment by women of equal rights to culture and education with men.

If only from the point of view of benefitting the development of children, the raising of the cultural and educational levels of women is a task that brooks no delay. The "Outline Programme of the Development of Chinese Children in the 1990s" points out, "Women play a key role in children's development and well-being."

Educational level of mothers

Research carried out abroad has proved that the educational level of the mother is directly related to the children's choice of the education they receive. The higher the education level of the mother, the higher the level of education the children aspire to receive. Research carried out in China also prove that the education level of the parents is directly related to the children's study results. Among children who rank excellent on their report cards, 49.2% have parents who have been to institutes of higher learning, and 13.8% have parents who have an education level above primary school. Only 7.4% have parents who are below the level of primary school in education. In those students who get a passing grade, only 6.6% have parents who have been to institutes of higher learning, 33.9% have parents who are educated at above primary school level, while 45.2% have parents with below primary school level education.

The results of all such studies go to show that the educational and cultural quality of the parents, especially the mothers, leaves a deep mark on the healthy development of children. Consequently, to give due emphasis to the elevation of the cultural and educational level of women is to safeguard the healthy development of children and through it the

attainment of targets on basic education for all. This in today's China is an arduous, time-consuming task. The appearance of parent schools has opened up a new way for women to receive continued education. The things learned are directly beneficial to the full play of the important role of women in the family, which enhances the value of parent schools to women. For instance , one mother by the name of Xue Shumei has been elected to the list of excellent parents in Beijing. She has been invited to pass on her own experiences to other parents. She says: "I knew absolutely nothing about how to educate children of pubescent age before I attended parent school. Now I know that children at that age are often irritable, and their predilection for friendship with the opposite sex is quite natural. What the parents must do at this stage is to provide patient guidance." In addition to learning about educating children, mothers raise their own level and become better persons by studying at parent schools. One mother who was semi-literate was in the habit of cursing and beating up her children for offences. The term of study at the parent school taught her to change her ways. She learned better methods of teaching them and made great progress so far as her own language and behaviour were concerned. She said:"Now, when the kids bring home poor report cards, instead of beating them up or swearing at them, I sit down and analyse the failures with them and find ways to change the situation together."

Participation of both parents

Many parent schools stress the importance of participation by both parents, and help to instruct the parents why it is necessary for both mother and father to undertake the duties of home education. Special effort is made to arouse in the fathers an awareness of their important roles, as they are capable of inspiring the children and producing a great impact on their thinking , will and moral quality. When this effort is met with success, it helps to create conditions for women to come out of the home and get into contact with wider sectors of community, thereby winning equal rights and opportunities. Actually , in urban China, the average father, especially one with an only child, generally shoulders an equal share of the duties and obligations of home education.

The effectiveness of parent schools in China

In the ten years and more since their appearance on the scene, parent schools have gained favourable results and made good progress. They have played an important role in promoting the scientific development of family education and forging close ties between family, school and community education.

Effectiveness in raising the level of family education

- Parents' awareness of the importance of family education has been awakened. More and more, they have come to look upon the family as something more than a mere living environment for children. Parents who have attended training courses in parent schools have begun to emphasize the creation of an atmosphere of education in the home. They go all out to enable their children to receive an imperceptible intellectual and moral education in an optimal environment. They make up new study plans and targets, and their children have come to see that success must come from conscientious hard work.

Knowledge of child growth and development

Parent knowledge of the various stages of the growth and development of the children has been deepened and strengthened through the wide dissemination of scientific knowledge of family education. In many schools for prospective mothers, active advocacy of the desirability of nursing at the mother's breast is being carried out. More and more young mothers pay greater attention to nutrition and health care during their pregnancies and nurse their own children as much as possible. One parent who studied in a training course of a parent school penned a summary of his own experiences and entitled it "Home Education Is a Science", in which he wrote:" I used to think that family education couldn't be simpler-just try to make the kid spend more time studying and less time playing. After listening to the lectures given by the teachers of the Family Education Central School, I have come to see that it is a profound and difficult science, containing many items of knowledge and methods the mastery of which needs the serious application on the part of parents."

- In fact, the impact of parent schools is not limited to parents. It has spread from all types of parent schools to the entire society, chiefly in propagating the scientific knowledge of the "three goods" (good childbirth, good upbringing and good education). Radio and TV parent schools have also an impact on innumerable parents. In China, distance radio and TV education institutions have been linked together to form a national network system, including the Central Radio and TV University, 43 radio and TV universities at the provincial, regional and municipal levels, more than 500 such universities at the prefectural level, 1,000 and more at the county level, and tens of thousands of radio and TV courses at the grass-roots level. Starting in 1983, when Beijing municipality made use of TV to offer a series of lectures on family education for parents of babies and pre-school children, the provincial authorities began also to start on the provincial TV stations their own programmes devoted to disseminating basic knowledge on family education. This has acted in a favourable manner on more and more people, sometimes without their being conscious of it. It imbues them with an awareness of the significance of family education and exerts on them an edifying and salutary influence.

- Parents have been inspired to make efforts to effect changes for the better in their own moral and intellectual character. Targets parents now tend to set a good example in their role of parents. A study of 95 families where 108 highly-rated school children at various ages was conducted in the municipality of Shanghai in 1987. The study covered 12 districts and 10 counties under the municipality, and was fairly representative of average conditions. Some of the major findings were: In matters touching on family relations , 91.6% reported harmonious relations between father and mother, 82.1% reported harmonious relations between parents and other members of the family, and 80.49% reported harmonious relations between parents and grandparents, which goes to prove that a good family environment is the foundation on which success in family education is built. Questioned about the parents' cultural and educational background, 78.95% reported having fathers who had received education at senior secondary school or higher, and 62.8% -having mothers who had been educated to this level. For the parents' performance at the work place, 78.9% reported both parents as having a positive, active work attitude and ethics. Further, 79.7% of the fathers had special knowledge or skills and interests of their own, as did 40.4% of the mothers. This goes to show that the cultural calibre of the parents is a key factor to the success of family education. This not only serves as an indicator of whether the parents are in possession of the wherewithal to conduct family education. More importantly, it serves as an indicator of whether they can provide their offspring with a model to imitate and learn from.

- The teaching methods of the parents have been updated and the general level of family education has been raised by virtue of the popularizing of scientific knowledge. As a result, there has been a decrease in the proportion of families in which the children are pampered and doted on or indulged. More and more families have become education-oriented. In these families the children are no longer the " Little Emperors" of a few years ago, nor are they limited and restrained at each step like prisoners freed on probation. They enjoy understanding and respect from their elders, and are accorded concern and equal treatment.

  A random sample of the children of 100 parents who attended the Central Parent School in Chaoyang district, Beijing municipality, which we have referred to many times previously, showed that all of them were in favour of parent schools. Through what they personally experienced at home, they said: "My mom has changed," "My pop is different from before," "I have gained a friend who understands me," "My parents go to school and I benefit from it." One even affirmed, "The parent school is an engineer who builds a bridge between souls."

Before and after: ways of educating one's child

A father compared the ways he educated his daughter before and since he attended the parent school. "Before we doted on our daughter and pampered her. We neglected to start educating her as early as possible, and allowed many bad habits to form in her. Even when we did try to educate her, we did not know the physiological and psychological characteristics of children, and our methods were crude and simple. As we did not know how to guide the child by making favourable use of her own character and the conditions of the situation, we often made her feel rebellious and contrary. A term of study at the parent school made a timely change in our teaching methods, mainly giving prominence to our daughter's strong points. We were able to express appreciation of them, while at the same time making criticism when necessary without making it appear that the shortcomings predominated. We give timely caution against possible mistakes and supervise and urge her in her work at the right moment and to the right extent. In criticism, we adhere to the principle of stating the facts and reasons, and convincing her not by coercion but by reasoning. Our daughter used to be irascible and hot-tempered, willful and unreasonable, an unruly girl who would never suffer to be reined in or restrained. Now she has turned into a good girl who loves to work at her lessons and is eager to follow civilized codes of behaviour."

However, not every parent is a professional educator. Neither can each and every one of them proceed to take courses in pedagogy. The most parent schools can do is to provide parents with an optimal and varied course of study. Such courses are still developing fast over the country, and what progress they have achieved can only be limited. Their worth lies in the fact that they have effected important changes in an ever-widening circle of families. They impart to ever larger numbers of parents scientific methods of family education, thus helping to create a favourable situation in family education all over the country. In this sense, there is no room for doubt that parent schools in China have been effective in promoting the level of family education in China.

Effectiveness of parent schools in promoting the integration of family education with school education

- Through learning at parent schools, parents are prepared mentally and psychologically for the process of sending their children to school. They are taught to appreciate the importance of early education and receive practical guidance in carrying out early education. There are many schools for parents of pre-school children run by nurseries and kindergartens, in which "Making Preparations for Sending One's Offspring to School" is a special subject. The parents learn about the essential differences between a child's life at home before starting school, and the life at school. They are also instructed in ways to develop the child's intellect in the early years and how to inculcate in him or her good learning habits. At many primary schools, special parent schools are run for parents of first-graders to give them some instruction on how to guide their children in the smooth transition from pre-school home life to school life. It is borne out by facts that those children who have been to kindergarten or who have received good education at an early age at home are not only in possession of rudimentary reading, writing and arithmetic skills, but are also more adapted psychologically to school life.

- Parents' understanding of school education is deepened through getting acquainted with the purpose, aim, and contents of school learning and of what the school requires of the pupils. Home education becomes a solid foundation and reliable supplement to school education, while the parents become able "assistants" to the school teachers. Parents who have been trained at parent schools tend to understand better the various requirements and demands of the school and are capable of integrating the requirements into their daily family education activities in a more conscious way. The children's educational environment is enlarged, and what they learn at school is more firmly consolidated.

  In families where the parents have had the benefit of attending parent schools, we find numerous examples of parents checking up on homework tasks, coaching their children in various subjects, correcting their improper habits, creating a better study environment for them, and also voluntarily getting in touch with the school and teachers on matters concerning their children. Furthermore, such parents often consciously try to build a bridge between their children and the school or teachers. This bridge of trust and understanding helps to produce in children an identification with the school and teachers, not only in academic study but also in feeling, which will go a long way to ensure that they actively and voluntarily accept the education that the school and teachers give them.

  In Shanghai, a study of 95 families with a total of 108 children credited with high-grades and good conduct finds that 54.7% of the parents have received training at parent schools, 88.4% have read books on family education, and 82.1% often get in touch with the schools about their children. In like manner, a Beijing study of 50 school children attending various "focal" secondary schools finds that 62% of the students think that family education in their own families has great success in inculcating in them a respect for their teachers, while 36% of the students think that the success of education in their families lies in breeding in them good study habits.

- Parents have become judges and supervisors of the academic work of schools at all levels through forming a close bond with the schools. They are therefore in a position to discover in a timely manner any shortcomings in teaching and in the overall education of children. They do not shirk their duty of making warm-hearted and eager suggestions for improvement.

Parent schools: the opinion of primary and secondary schools

In a study of 1,168 primary and secondary schools in the municipality of Beijing, 75,9% of the schools indicate that they think parent schools help to promote moral education at school, 69.6% think that parent schools play a helping role in the transformation of students who lag behind others in behaviour or academically, 69.9% think the parent schools help to improve the quality of the academic teaching at school, and 53.2% think that they promote healthy changes in school management. The parent schools run by certain communities have been instrumental in mobilizing the various forces in the communities to give practical assistance to the schools, such as helping the schools to set up libraries and reading rooms, donating books and money to the schools, providing the schools with transport facilities when field inyestigations, excursions, etc., are organized for teachers and pupils.

Effectiveness of parent schools in promoting the integration of family education, school education and community education

China's parent schools have brought immeasurable benefits to the family, the school and also to society as a whole. The family has always been inseparable from society, being the basic construction block of society, and its stability and progress has a direct bearing on the stability and progress of society. On the healthy development of the younger generation is hinged the future of the country and the nation. All this goes to show that no family is an island--it is joined to society in many ways. Families undertake for the sake of society the important task and duty of nurturing the younger generation. In view of this close relationship, families must turn their faces to society, and on the other hand, society must concern itself with the individual family. In the past ten years and more, parent schools in China have built a bridge between the family and society.

They have aroused society to view the family and family education with importance, spurring society to make conscious efforts to concern itself with and render support to family education. The emergence on a national scale of radio and TV parent schools and the publication of a large collection of books on family education are proofs of this concern and support.

Existing problems in China's parent school system and suggestions for its improvement

Viewed from all above perspectives, the parent schools in China have been successful and effective. This is the credit side of the picture. However, on the debit side, there have been many shortcomings and problems which must not be overlooked.

Problems

- Uneven geographical distribution:

In China, parent schools are mainly concentrated in cities and urban areas. The development of parent schools has been going on well in areas where the quality of the population is better than that in less favoured areas. However, in the wide reaches of the agricultural areas, parent schools are few and far between, and with 80% of China's vast population living in the rural areas, this is a serious weakness.

Rural parents face an especially arduous task in these new times and deserve to receive guidance from parent schools. Likewise, parents of disabled children and children from

single-parent families, etc., have too few special parent schools and the few there are seem to be spread too thin.

- Faulty supervision and management:

To be exact, there does not exist at present a sound and comprehensive system for the supervision and management of parent schools in China. For over a decade parent schools have mainly been run on a spontaneous basis, and a variety of organizational forms, course contents, and teaching methods have made it difficult to carry out a unified system of supervision and management. The great majority of parent schools do not submit themselves to any process of assessment of qualification of the personnel involved. No unified standards, requirements or examinations are set for the competence of the teachers, the suitability of the teaching materials and teaching programmes and the results of the courses. This has led to serious lack of effectiveness in a few parent schools which produce little or no benefit for the parents. In addition, some education administrations have over the years been focusing on the numerical increase of parent schools without giving any consideration to the long-term development of such schools. Objective evaluations of the quality of the schools are neglected. The result has been that the serious problems existing in parent schools are not discovered, and there is no urge to set up or improve their supervision and management system. Right now, however, measures are being taken to solve the problems.

- Lack of a unified view:

As parent schools concern many sectors of society, they not only need the participation of parents and the guidance of school authorities, but also require that the whole society render them adequate support. However, various sectors of society lack a unified view of the importance of parent schools and of how best they can be run.

In 1993 the Education Department of Beijing municipality made a study of 15 secondary school in Chongwen district and 52 primary schools in the same district, 76 secondary schools in Haidian district, and 65 primary schools in Xichen district, and discovered that 46.7%, 28.8%, 23.7% and 18.5% respectively of the parents did not act in co-ordination with the schools to carry out family education on their children. The percentage of schools that complained that teachers did not have the time to give guidance in family education was respectively 40.0%, 23.1%, 21.1% and 9.2%. Those that complained of lack of space, expenses and teaching materials rated respectively at 20.1%, 19.9%, 19.7% and 7.6%. Those that complained of lack of support from social sectors rated respectively at 33.3%, 17.4%, 2.6% and 6.2%.

All this is ample proof that unifying the views of all sectors of society on the importance of establishing parent schools is a serious problem that urgently needs to be solved.

- Poor overall quality of parent schools themselves:

At present, parent schools in China are in general divided according to the children's age groups, with a few divided according to the "grades" the children are in, such as schools for parents of 1st and 2 nd year pupils, of 3rd and 4th year pupils, etc. Hence all types of parent schools concentrate more on questions of common interest in accordance with the children's age or grade, while paying insufficient attention to the individual traits of children from different family surroundings or to the special characteristics of parents from different professional backgrounds and varying cultural or educational backgrounds. The instructions given at the parent schools lacks specific reference.

The investigation carried out by the Education Department of Beijing municipality on scores of primary and secondary schools reveals that as with school education, the most difficult areas in home education are the education of children from one-child families, single-parent families, families of self-employed persons and entrepreneurs, and families with only grandparents taking care of the bringing up of children. At the same time, the "poor quality of parents" is the main obstacle to schools attempting to give guidance in home education.

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Although the solution of these problems lies ultimately in the co-operation of all social forces, parent schools should be the first bridge to close the gap between family and school. They should address and find solutions for problems such as how to give well-aimed and effective guidance to parents of varying cultural backgrounds, how to solve concrete problems found in children with different personal traits, how to make parent schools more effective and to manage them in a more scientific way.

Suggestions for improvement

- Arouse the awareness of all sectors of society to attach importance to family education and publicize widely the idea that it is necessary to run parent schools well:

First of all, society must be helped to realize that home education is an essential link in the course of children's development. Home education, school education and social education are the three integral parts of the overall education process of a nation, none of which can be omitted, and each of which will play an important role in the overall process of a child's development. Parent schools are an effective way to join the three closely together. Therefore, a parent school well run will be beneficial to the development of children. At the same time it will have a salutary effect on the reform and progress of school and social education.

Second, the members of society must be helped to see that well-run parent schools promote a change for the better in the ethos of a society and the building of a civilized mental and ethical atmosphere. Parent schools help to improve the all-round quality of parents, effect changes in the idea of family education, improve methods of family education, and promote the healthy development of children. At the same time, a good moral atmosphere will appear in the family and society at large. As the family is the cell of the social body, any progress gained in this cell will bring about corresponding progress in society.

Thirdly, all members of society should be made to see, through the successful experiences of parent schools, that such schools can raise the cultural quality of the people.

- A comprehensive supervision and management mechanism for parent schools should be set up:

In this respect, what has been done in Beijing municipality is worth emulating. In 1987, parent schools emerged and soon large numbers were set up all over Beijing. The Beijing Education Department placed them all under unified management. In a joint action with the Beijing Women's Federation and the Beijing Family Education Research Society, they drew up the *Programme of Family Education for Primary Schools and the Programme of Family Education for Secondary Schools*. These were also used as concrete policy guidelines for parent schools, and the various compulsory education schools were charged with their application. In the process of carrying out the programmes, the compulsory education schools were required to draw up teaching plans, acquire teaching materials, employ qualified lecturers and teachers, and conduct examinations and analysis of the results. The concrete results achieved in promoting family education and conducting parent schools would become part of the contents to be evaluated by the Education Department when appraisals were made of the educational work of governments at the district level and of the schools themselves. Rewards and penalties would be meted out accordingly. Those schools obtaining good results in family education would be rewarded through the Beijing Family Education Reward Fund. The Beijing Women's Federation appointed special personnel to take charge of family education work. The Women's Federation also worked jointly with the Beijing Family Education Research Society to assist the Beijing Education Department in getting a good grip on family education. In general, their major task was to develop social investigation, organize research on special topics, compile teaching materials, convene family education forums and symposiums, and give help to family education in various forms as well as make suggestions for improvement.

- The systematic structure of parent schools needs to be built up and perfected, so that in the process of their popularization and proliferation, the parent schools may be enable to play a more substantive role. In building a structural system for parent schools, it is desirable

to achieve a more even and rational geographical distribution, aiming in particular at the rural areas so as to spread the message of change to the individual, family and society through parent schools. The education of parents should be conducted at different levels and in accordance with different needs.

The compilation of teaching materials should be based on widely conducted social investigation while taking into account the real family education needs of schools, sectors of society, etc. The training of teachers for parent schools is another matter demanding the closest attention. In the *Outline Programme for the Development of Chinese Children in 1990s*, the suggestion is made to gradually start Family Education courses on a trial basis in normal universities and institutes so as to provide theoretical support and talented personnel for the improvement of the family and social environment of children's development.

- Laws and regulations should be enacted to ensure the smooth carrying out of family education and the running of parent schools:

The present Law on Compulsory Education and the Law on the Protection of Minors already act as legal bases for the setting up of parent schools. However, the proclamation of a special law or regulation pertaining explicitly to parent schools would do much to boost the drive to establish and perfect parent schools. A Law on Family Education is now on the agenda and will be an important government measure to achieve the 1990s targets for child development in China. The provinces and municipalities should formulate local rules and regulations to supplement national legislation.

The Shanghai municipal government has formally proclaimed "Rules for Protection of Youth and Teenagers," containing clear-cut legal stipulations for the protection of family education. Family education in Shanghai is therefore well on the path to systematization and legalization.

- International co-operation and exchange should be expanded in order to learn from successful foreign experiences and also to further popularize China's parent schools and raise their quality.

International co-operation

We are looking for intellectual support from UNESCO and other international organizations, advisory services by UNESCO experts and consultants, related information and materials, and an international symposium of parent schools in rural China at the end of this century.

Concluding remarks

Parent schools in China have travelled an eventful path in the past ten years and have made great achievements obvious to all. Their impact has been felt in all aspects of social life. They have contributed to encouraging changes in the family, the school, society and the younger generation. However, existing problems must not be neglected. Whether these problems can be solved quickly and effectively is a matter that will have a bearing on the extension and development of parent schools all over the country. At the present time, Chinese society has come to attach great importance to education and to the increasing need for talented, expert people. The international community is also universally attaching importance to the role of the family for the development of children and in the attainment of global targets on basic education for all. Against this background, China's parent schools have a long, arduous way to go, and it will take all of us working as one to accomplish the task.

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